Exploring Practice-Linked Identities Construction in Culturally Diverse Urban Youth Through an Intergenerational Garden-Based Learning Project

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- One year garden-based learning project at UBC Farm
- Intergenerational (Farm Friends)
- Plan, grow, harvest, cook, eat and compost
- Experiential learning, hands-on
- Four Vancouver public elementary school classes (Grade 3-7)
GBR concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the children is scarce. This tendency has overshadowed children’s voices privileging adult’s practice and research agendas.

Gardens are often treated as a tool or an add-on to the curriculum rather than a co-teacher (Williams & Dixon, 2013).
What are the practice-linked identities that culturally diverse, urban, elementary students construct through participation in a one-year, intergenerational, garden-based learning experience?

What elements of this garden-based learning experience appear to play a role in supporting the construction of these identities?

(Urueta Ortiz, T. 2016).
Garden Based Learning

- **Instrumental**: As an instructional strategy that utilizes a garden as a teaching tool.

- **Holistic**: The garden is a *co-teacher*, the foundation for integrated learning, in and across disciplines, through active, engaging, and real-world experiences.

(Desmond, Grieshop & Subramaniam, 2002, 2004)
“Identities do not exist as isolated constructs in the minds of individuals. Identities are co-constructions, inextricable from both the individuals and their surroundings and relationships. Students do not and cannot construct identity at will and out of nowhere. They are constrained and guided by the possible identities available in the social situation.”

(Shanahan, 2009, p. 44).
“Practice-linked identities are identities that people come to take on, **construct and embrace** that are linked to participation in particular social and cultural practices.”

“**Extend beyond learning** (though learning is certainly critical) to the very definition of who one is and who one is in the process of becoming through participation.”

(Nasir & Hand, 2008, p. 147, 176)
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & METHODS

- Qualitative Case Study, informed by constructivist/phenomenological methodologies.
- Focus Groups and Individual Interviews w/children & parents.
- Participant Observation.
The ‘New’ Social Study of Childhood (Holloway & Valentine, 2004; Prout, 2011; Valentine, 1997; Wells, 2009).

- Children are active participants in society and not passive subjects of the social process.
- Childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon bounded by time and place.
- That the category “child” is not universal.
### Table 1. Summary of Participants and Type of Interviews (N=32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Groups interviews</th>
<th>Individuals Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of focus groups</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Students participating in focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students participating in focus groups</td>
<td>23 (Ten Grade 5 students, five Grade 6 students, eight Grade 7 students)</td>
<td>Students participating in individual interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Elementary Schools</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 Grade 9 students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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FINDINGS

Children that participated in the ILLP re/construct practice-link identities:

- Through relationships with non-parental adults: Farm Friends
- Through relationships with more than-human-world: Interacting with other non-human animals and systems
- Through new relationships with food and culture: Intercultural and intergenerational discoveries and frictions
- Around the ideas of freedom and agency: Taking risks, taking ownership, taking control
- As learners: Expanding the sense of what learning is and where it takes place
- Through play: Imagination and pretend play in the forest
Constructing identities through relationships with non-parental adults: Farm Friends

“When children have positive experiences they develop an understanding of themselves as significant and respected, and feel a sense of belonging” (Nasir & Hand, 2008).

“During class not being in the class, during school not being in school, being with other people [Farm Friends].” Jaiya (grade 6)
The recognition, reassurance, respect, and expert knowledge that FFs provided to student alumni play a crucial role in student alumni engagement and in children’s unique sense of themselves and belonging.

When individuals feel that their identities are linked to the settings they are in, they are more engaged and learn more (Nasir & Cooks, 2009).
“I remember bees and I am not a big fan of bees but I know that they are really really helpful. I think before the farm I did not like them, [but] after going to the farm because I was around them more, so I actually ended liking bees. But I still do not like wasps.”

(Emily, Grade 6)
Food is used by young people to inform and support their identity and the ways they relate to and judge others.

“I started eating more kale but since my parents are Asian, both of them, they do not like Western foods so I cannot have as much ... But whenever they go to a natural food store I just remind them to buy kale.” (JLS, Grade 6)
Constructing identities around the ideas of freedom and agency: Taking risks, taking ownership, taking control

“Being dirty, and being really excited, and getting mud everywhere, being really gross and touching and playing with worms” (G5)
“...This is like a different type of learning, not like taking [a] test, you know like studying for a test. This is like you are learning and it so fun that you remembered it ...” (BS, Grade 6)

Learner identity has been described as “the situated construction of oneself as a learner” (Falsafi & Coll, 2010, p. 219).

“people with a learning identity see themselves as learners, seek and engage life experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn” (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).
Constructing identities through play: Imagination and pretend play in the forest

- The voices I heard during the interviews articulated the importance of play in becoming through participation and in the construction of playful identities. These identities are fundamental in the construction of meaningful learning experiences.

- The centrality of play in learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Vygotsky, 1933/1966) and identity construction (Booth, 1985), and the importance of having educational contexts that foster children’s playing, exploring, interacting, and learning on their own (Bartlett, 2011).
CONCLUSIONS

- The dominant and richest memories of ILLP involved the social aspects of the experience.

- FFs’ mentorship which included support, encouragement, respect and expert knowledge was paramount in student alumni engagement with the ILLP.

- ILLP student alumni learned through their participation at the ILLP how to be with nature and non-human animals, these experiences were important experiences in their development and in the construction of their identities by learning new perspectives.
CONCLUSIONS

- A significant outcome of my study was that participation in ILLP had an impact in children’s knowledge and attitudes towards food.

- My study highlights and illustrates the emergent learning opportunities supported by the rich educational context of the Children’s Garden at UBC Farm. **Children’s memories about the knowledge** they acquired associated with this experience were notable.
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- The role of children in co-designing garden-based education activities.
- The ways in which social identities (i.e., race, gender, and class, socioeconomic status) interact with and inform the construction of practice-based identities.
- To inquiry into the food discourses underpinning Garden-based education.
- To look at special education and inclusivity in GBL practices.
How the **gender** of Farm Friends at the ILLP influences children’s perceptions of Garden-based education

To inquire into the influence of the **more-than-human world** in the re/construction of children identities

To look **more closely** at the use of **focus group interviews** with children as a **research method**
References


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